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Charting New Paths for Midlife Careers and Lifestyles

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Will You Miss an Opportunity for Meaning?

Have you noticed that opportunities show up daily to say “yes” to having more meaning in your life? Over a lunch with a past client and friend we talked about how chance meetings and life circumstances can sometimes result in making a difference in someone else’s life plus adding richness to our own experience. Rannell Dahl shared the story of how a trip to Latvia to discover her husband’s roots lead to a long distance relationship and improving the lives of a family in this foreign land.

An Opportunity to Contribute

"In 1993, 49 years after escaping his Soviet-controlled homeland of Latvia, my husband, Olav Lejnicks, and I planned a pilgrimage to revisit the people and villages of his childhood and revive his Latvian language skills. We wanted to find a way to support the Latvian people in the rebuilding of their country. Little did we know how a very special opportunity to help would cross our paths.

Finding a place to stay during our trip required searching the little towns and talking with the townspeople. Early one evening, as we were performing our daily search, we met Galina waiting for her bus to a neighboring village. As Olav talked with this jovial lady, he noticed she spoke Latvian with a Russian accent. Galina suggested we inquire about rooms at the former TB sanitarium just down the road. In spite of our rather hesitant response, she drew us a map and we offered her a ride home. She accepted, as her bus wouldn't arrive for another 2 hours.

As we arrived at the large, old, crumbling farmhouse, converted into several tiny apartments, one of Galina's teenaged sons, Kiril, bolted down the driveway to greet us. His expression changed from one of welcome to a look of semi-alarm when he found out we were Americans - the former enemies of his Soviet country of Belarus. We could almost read his mind - 'who has Mother dragged home?' Galina's younger son, Sergej, was inside 'doing his homework' as he played with their wolf-dog and cat.

During our 2-hour visit, speaking a combination of Latvian, Russian, German and sign language, we learned that Galina had been an economist/accountant in Belarus. After the nearby Chernobyl disaster, she took her sons across the border into Latvia where a sanitarium was accepting patients suffering from the debilitating effects of radiation exposure.

While recovering in Latvia, Galina decided not to return to Belarus and discovered the sanitarium needed a bookkeeper. With her work experience and enthusiasm for learning the complex Latvian language, she got the job. With few resources life in their new country was not easy. In spite of the hardships, this single mom expected her sons to complete their educations and become productive citizens of their adopted country.

By the time we met her at the bus stop in 1993, she and her family had mastered the Latvian language and her sons were doing well in school. Each son had a career goal and a plan to accomplish it.

After our visit, we continued to think about how this family valued education and their financial situation. Flashing back to my husband's family's experiences, as Latvian immigrants to Germany and finally to the U.S., who worked their way through graduate and medical schools by doing farm work, we decided to set up a basic education fund for Kiril and Sergej. We sent \$100 a month to be used for school tuition, supplies, bus fare to school and other necessities. We communicated with them via their school's email system and received consistent updates, regarding the subjects they were taking, their grades, which classes they liked and which they merely tolerated. When they had questions about life in the U.S., we sent them information that they could use for their school assignments.

After approximately 4 years of our contributions, we received a warm phone call from the family letting us know that they could manage financially on their own. Both sons had just graduated, started new jobs and Galina

started her own business. They thanked us from their hearts and told us how much our care and support had meant to them in earning their university degrees and adopting them into our family.

From our perspective, their own determination and day-to-day hard work had resulted in their accomplishments. Kiril earned an MBA and today manages a bank. Sergej is an attorney and is a partner in a law firm.

Both Kiril and Sergej are married and each has a son, whom we spoil as if they were our own grandchildren. Galina has her own home-based accounting business and has purchased her own apartment. Their family plan is to contribute to the education of the next generation of children, including immigrants to Latvia from their former country.

We stay in close contact with the Belarussian branch of our family and are grateful that this mother's bus was late, on the evening we found her patiently waiting for two American strangers to offer her a ride."

Not all of us find ourselves traveling in a foreign land with such a unique story. But in our daily lives there are chance encounters and circumstances that offer us choices and "An Opportunity to Contribute". These choices can infuse more meaning in your life or leave you feeling unfulfilled and yearning to make a difference. Consider that since you have one life to live, how will you make it a meaningful life that has made an impact?

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Coach and Author, Mary Radu, guides midlife individuals and couples to find the core of what's truly important for life's next stage and get into action to achieve it. She helps end the struggle and uncover career, lifestyle and retirement options built on experience and passion. Get immediate tips and resources from her ezine plus a f.r.e.e sample of her audio/workbook program, **Roadmap to Meaningful Midlife®** at www.PathmakerCoaching.com or contact her at mary@PathmakerCoaching.com .